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ABSTRACT

Self-reported perceptions of elementary school students (6,500 fourth through sixth graders), were obtained by means of questionnaires. Included among the perceptions were: reason for school, role as a rule obeyer, role as a teacher pleaser and role as an achiever. The results indicate that students generally like their school, believe the rules of their class room are just about right, are willing to obey them, and believe they are doing about as well as other students in their classroom. The report concludes that students believe their classmates would rather play than work, that school is important to their future, and that school is teaching them to prepare for a job or teaching them things they need to know when they grow up. The students perceive themselves primarily as rule obeyers and teacher pleasers. Also suggested is the fact that about a third of the students are dissatisfied with school, would prefer not to attend school, are not aware of their teacher's evaluation of their school work, and feel that their achievement is less than satisfactory. The data also reveals great differences in student perceptions from school to school. (author/MC)

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SELF REPORTED PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AS LEARNERS IN THE ECOLOGY OF THE SCHOOL

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In the spring of 1969, self-reported perceptions of elementary school students as learners in the ecology of the school were obtained by means of questionnaires. Approximately 6,500 fourth through sixth graders in forty-two East Central Indiana Schools were studied. Included among the perceptions examined were: reason for school, role as a rule obeyer, as a teacher pleaser, and role as an achiever.

Student perceptions of the most important reason to go to school varied greatly from school to school. Percentages of students in a school building who felt "I learn things that I can use right now outside of school" ranged from a low of zero percent to a high of thirty-three percent. Percentages choosing the response "I learn how to get along with lots of other people" ranged from a low of two percent to a high of twenty-seven percent. The response "I learn what I need when I grow up" was chosen by percentages of respondents ranging from a low of eighteen percent to a high of fifty-four percent. Percentages of students choosing the response "I need to learn to get a job" ranged from a low of ten percent to a high of forty-seven percent. "Everybody has to go to school" was chosen by percentages of respondents ranging from a low of zero percent to a high of thirteen percent.

Future oriented reasons for attending school are dominant according to these respondents. They believe that the reason for school is to learn what they will need when they grow up or what they need to learn to get a job. Learning things that they can use right now outside of school was the third most frequently chosen response. Learning how to get along with lots of other people was next most frequently chosen. The fact that everybody has to go to school seemed of least importance, since it was chosen by the smallest percentages of respondents.

The responses of these students suggest two kinds of variability. There are ~~at least~~ five different alternatives given for school, reflecting variability within the school buildings, and the percentages of responses assigned to any one possible response reflected variabilities among the school buildings. The variability of these responses suggests that the ecology of the school is a contributing factor in the differences in perception. Similar variabilities are evident in the responses to the items which follow.

Whatever their reasons for school, students generally like their school. In thirty-eight of the forty-two schools, fifty percent or more of the students reported that either they liked their school or that they liked it very much. At the low end of the continuum, twenty-six percent of the students in one school reported that they liked their school while the highest percentage which reported that they liked their school or liked it very much reached eighty-eight at one school. Percentages of students as low as two and as high as thirty-eight reported that they neither liked nor disliked their school.

Reporting that they would like to stay away from school on many days were percentages ranging from a low of four to a high of thirty-eight. In some schools no students reported that if they could they would quit school, while in others, a high of eighteen percent reported that they would quit if they could. The data suggests that in most schools a sizeable percentage of students are either indifferent to schools or would avoid attending school, for part of the time at least, if they could. In some schools the percentage of students reporting that they neither liked or disliked or would avoid attending school at least part of the time exceeded fifty percent.

Student perceptions of reasons for school and their attitudes toward their schools may be linked to their perceptions of what is important in their

classrooms. In completing this statement, "In my room it is most important to:" the largest percentage of students chose the response, "be neat, quiet, and polite." The percentage choosing this response ranged from a low of fourteen to a high of fifty-eight with the most frequently occuring percentages in the range thirty-three to forty. The response "have something important to say when you raise your hand" was chosen by percentages ranging from a low of zero to a high of twenty-five. The response, "know how to look up material on my own to find answers" was in some schools chosen by no students while the highest percentage for a given school was thirty-eight. With four exceptions, fewer than twenty-five percent of the students in any school responded that in their classroom it was most important to have the right answers to their teacher's questions. As students perceive it, then, it is more important for them to be neat, quiet, and polite than it is for them to perform learning tasks.

When asked how they felt about the rules in their classroom, in every school more than half of the students reported that they felt the rules were about right. Percentages of students who felt the rules were about right ranged from a low of fifty-four in one school to a high of eighty-five. Of those students who did not feel the rules were about right, more felt that the rules were too strict rather than not strict enough. Percentages of those who felt the rules were too strict ranged from a low of six to a high of thirty-five. Such student acceptance of rules in their classrooms might seem to suggest student participation in classroom activities and relative freedom in relationships with classmates; however, further examination of the data seems to suggest that this is not the case.

One item in the questionnaire elicited students' perceptions of the degree to which they were involved in classroom planning. In thirty-six of the forty-

two schools, fewer than a fourth of the students reported that their teachers allowed pupils to participate extensively in planning what to do. Percentages of students who felt that students participated extensively in planning ranged from a low of zero to a high of thirty. Teachers occasionally asked pupils for their opinion in planning what to do according to percentages ranging from a low of thirteen to a high of forty-seven. However, as many as fifty-eight percent of the students in some schools reported that teachers do most of the planning and tell pupils what to do. In general, students report either that teachers occasionally ask pupils for their opinion or that teachers do most of the planning and tell pupils what to do. There seems, therefore, little support for the hypothesis that students are satisfied with the rules in their classrooms because they play an important part in planning classroom activities.

The second hypothesis formed in connection with the finding about students' attitudes toward rules in their classroom was that they enjoyed relatively free relationships with their classmates. Data regarding this hypothesis was obtained from responses to the item, "During the school day may you speak to another pupil in your classroom without getting permission from your teacher?" The response "always" was chosen by percentages ranging from a low of zero to a high of thirty-three percent. The most frequently occuring percentages were on the order of four to ten. Percentages choosing "usually" ranged from a low of zero to a high of thirty-eight with the most common frequency in the range ten to twenty percent. Between thirty and forty percent of the students reported that they were sometimes able to speak to another pupil without getting permission from their teacher. Percentages of students reporting that they were seldom or never able to speak to another student in their classroom without getting permission from their teacher ranged from a low of zero in two schools to a high of seventy-three; percentages for most schools were in

the range of forty to fifty.

While there were a few schools in which students seemed to enjoy relative freedom in communicating with classmates during school days, for a majority of students sometimes, seldom, or never were the most frequently chosen responses. The hypothesis that students are satisfied with the rules in their classroom because of relative freedom in relationships with classmates seems, therefore, untenable.

Is it likely that students' acceptance of conditions in their schools and teachers' intentions to maintain control contribute to passivity in learning rather than to the active learning which most teachers suggest that they are trying to stimulate? Perhaps it is the students' perceptions of themselves in relation to the teacher which leads students to accept limited opportunities for participation in planning classroom activities and for relationships with other students.

How do students perceive their relationships with teachers in the classrooms? Generally, according to the students, teachers are to be pleased. In response to the question, "Which of the following describes how you feel about the teacher?" students reported that they "always try hard to do what the teacher wants." Percentages of students choosing this response ranged from a low of thirty-one to a high of fifty-nine. Percentages almost as large chose the response "I try to do what the teacher wants but sometimes can't." Some students reported their ambivalence toward the teacher. Percentages ranging from a low of two to a high of twenty-seven responded that, "Sometimes I try to do what the teacher wants and sometimes I don't." Fewer than fifteen percent of the students in any one school reported that they, "Often don't care whether or not I please the teacher," while fewer than ten percent reported that they "don't worry about trying to please the teacher." Students

do perceive themselves as teacher pleasers and perhaps for this reason are willing to obey the rules in their classrooms.

Moreover, when a teacher does not like what they have done, the majority of students reported that they "try to find out what the teacher wants so that they can do that." Percentages of students who reported trying to figure out what the teacher wants in order that they might do that range from a low of thirty-six to a high of eighty-three, with the more frequent percentages on the order of sixty to seventy percent. Some students reported that they "stop trying to please the teacher." Percentages of students ranging from zero to twenty-three reported that they "don't care that the teacher thinks." The data seem to support the notion that students are indeed teacher pleasers.

"How does your teacher feel you are doing in your school work?" we asked the students. In most cases the largest percentage of students reported that their teachers felt that they do "as well as most others in the class." In one school, seventy-four percent of the students reported that their teacher felt that they did not do as well as most others in the class. In many schools from one-fourth to one-third of the students reported that they didn't know how their teacher felt they were doing in their school work.

We have examined student perceptions of themselves as rule obeyers and teacher pleasers. Let us turn to an examination of their perceptions of themselves as learners. As might be expected, the largest percentage of students reported that the thing which they do in school that they are most proud of is "getting good grades on my report card." Next most frequently reported as a source of pride was their "being well liked by all the students." Percentages of students ranging from a low of three to a high of twenty-eight percent reported that "nothing that I do in school makes me proud.

In most schools, more than fifty percent of the students reported that in

their class they would most like to be "the one who gets the best grades." Percentages choosing the response ranged from a low of thirty-five to a high of seventy-five. Next most frequently chosen was, "the one who is the best at helping the teacher."

Answers to the question, "How do you feel you are doing in school?" may provide data for examining the congruence between their perceptions of how they are doing and what they would most like to be in their classrooms. "Very well, one of the best in the class," was the response chosen by percentages of students ranging from zero to thirty-one, with the majority of percentages in the frequency ten to twenty percent. "Better than most others in the class" was the response chosen by percentages ranging from seven to thirty-one. The largest percentage of students chose the response, "as well as most others in the class," with percentages of students choosing this response in the range of twenty-two to sixty-five. In most schools, from ten to forty percent of the students reported that they were not doing as well as most others in the class or that they were "one of the poorest in the class."

Also of interest were students' perceptions of their classmates as students. In general, students believe that their classmates "would rather play than work on assignments." Percentages of students expressing this view range from a low of twenty-eight to a high of eighty. In two schools, fifty percent of the students reported that their classmates "like to study and do their school work." However, in most schools fewer than a fourth of the students were of this opinion. Rewards, such as stars or dots for doing their work seemed to be of very little importance; percentages ranging from zero to twenty-nine perceived such rewards as being motives for doing school work with the modal percentage in the range zero to ten percent. Depending on the school, from zero to thirty-eight percent of the students believe that

their classmates "study because they want to get better grades than other students." Fewer than twenty percent of the students in any one school reported that their classmates "don't like to study and have to be forced to do so." More students, then, believe their classmates would rather play than work on school assignments.

With the exception of the students in two schools, more than two-thirds of the students believe that teachers treat everyone just about the same. When students believe preference is shown either to boys or girls, students are more likely to perceive teachers as favoring the girls.

In summary, students generally like their schools, believe the rules of their classroom are just about right, are willing to obey them, are very interested in pleasing the teacher, and while they hold high expectancies for themselves as students, in general believe they are doing about as well as other students in their classroom. In general, students believe their classmates would rather play than work, that school is important to their future, is teaching them to prepare for a job, or teaching them things they need to know when they grow up. At best, students report only occasionally being able to influence the planning of school work, and only occasionally being able to talk with classmates during the school day without the teachers' permission. They are then, as they perceive it, primarily rule obeyers and teacher pleasers. The data also suggest that while the generalizations just made are appropriate for a large number of students in the schools in grades four through six, approximately a third of the students are dissatisfied with school, would prefer not to be in attendance in schools, and are unknowing of their teachers' evaluation of their school work, while at the same time feeling that their achievement is less than satisfactory.

The data also reveal the great differences from school building to school building in the way students perceive their learning environment.